

MORE LETTERS
TO MY SON

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THESE letters belong to the same period as those in the First Series, but for certain private reasons were not published until now.



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I. ON PRINCES' HOUSES

I. ON PRINCES' HOUSES



TO-DAY has been a momentous one. We have been making a grand tour of the house for the purpose of settling exactly where my little lord shall have his apartments. If I had yielded to my own innermost and quite selfish desires, I would have chosen for one the room just next to mine (not your father's dressing-room, the one on the other side), so that I could have the door open between and hear you every time you stirred in your little blankets. But, beloved, there were greater things than my own pleasure to be considered. If I could rely upon your *only* stirring in your little blankets, I would have no compunction in pulling to pieces a room that has been quite lately most expensively decorated in a style not at all suitable to embryonic masculinity. But I

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know that before you finally settle down to taking this world as it comes, you will have one or two things to say in your own way and at your own time. And a previous experience of other people's babies has taught me to expect that your own time is most likely to be midnight or the early hours, and your own way a passionate and sleep-destroying protest which might not sound such exquisite music to Oliver as it would to me.

Now, if I could only manage to get you instead of that to say quietly, like a little gentleman, "Excuse me, but you have sewn my binder to my body," or, failing such reasonableness, could prevail upon your father to be impervious to your vocalisings, I might be wasteful enough to strip the expensive walls and wicked enough to rob the nurse of her privacy; but love you as I do, my littlest, your father is first—not first before you, because to me you both seem one, but first before my own

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indulgence ; and so, with a sigh, I shut up the wish in my heart and led the way heroically to the left wing.

I don't want to seem self-glorious, but I do think that ought to go down in my good book for the day, don't you ?

All day long Oliver and I have been busy with your new house, and to make a house *inside* a house is just one of the most delicious and absorbing ways of spending time and money and thought that can be imagined.

First, in order that the suite shall be quite self-contained and quiet, there are to be swing doors of baize. The idea was not exactly mine, still it is not a bad one, even though I shall always have to go inside the doors before I can catch a sound of you ; but they will insure you against house-parties, and—oh, beloved, that there could be such thoughts in a world—house-parties against you ! And, as men very often come down to stay for week-ends, you won't be at

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all sorry to have something between you and their extraordinary habits. They have a way of taking only three meals a day, and not going to sleep between them. That, I know, would not meet with your approval at all, and rightly so. Also, they carry eternally in their mouths dark wooden things which end in bowls, not filled with milk but with fire, and these things emit an odour that has nothing whatever to do with orris-root or violet-powder. On the whole, I think you will be glad of the doors.

Next, we had to apportion the rooms. There is one for your night nursery and one for your day nursery, and one for the nurse's very own sitting-room, so that when you are asleep and she can legitimately be sick to death of you—forgive her, she is not your mother—she may be in her own place and in her own chair, with her own photographs upon the walls. That is my cunningness to make her love you better.

ON PRINCES' HOUSES

Your mother is a very serpent for wisdom at times.

Of course the doctor is going to see that the ventilation of the rooms is quite right for a baby to grow his little lungs in ; and, of course, if it isn't, a noble army of workmen shall come to make it perfect. But when we have done that, and given you plenty of light, warm clothes and enough soap and water for your outside and the right amount of good plain food for your inside, you will be allowed to live as any baby ought to live.

When I think of the poor little lambs that are antisepticked and sterilised, and *verboden* this and *verboden* that, till their very bodies *atrophy* for want of a few hearty microbes to stand up to, my heart aches. There may be no kisses, for therein lurks disease ; there may be no pictures nor pretty hangings, for dust is held by them ; no baby talk, because it is not wise ; no talk of Christ and beauty, for fear it is not true.

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Little child, you are going to be born in a fragrant country-side and all the sweetnesses of it are going to be yours. And except when the youthful ailments come and are routed by the doctor and the medicine chest, you shall not think of your body at all, except to be glad of it. And you shall have all the prettiest things that the most exacting baby could even hope to open its eyes upon, and we will say, with our noses tossed—yours will be born tossed if you decide to favour your mother, beloved—with our noses tossed and our lips curved dauntlessly, “*that* for the microbes!”

The room that is to be your day nursery is light and sunny, with a lattice window that looks down into the courtyard and far out beyond. The walls are wood panelled, and there are lovely cupboards and presses built in at one end, where your linen will be kept in beds of lavender. And it is all to be painted white—white and fresh and sweet; and the

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little short muslin curtains will be white and frilly and the hangings will be gay and rosy, and they will all be made so that they can go into the wash-tub as often as *ever* they like.

Oh, beloved, I am so glad there are lattice windows to your rooms ; you don't know *what* they make me feel. Somehow it seems to me as if no one, no matter what he had to put up with, or how much he had to go through could find life quite black or quite hopeless if he had begun his existence in a room with a lattice window. There are the little criss-cross panes that only let you see tantalisingly what the world is like outside, and that make you jump out of bed in such a hurry to fling the window wide and know the day that lies before you. And with that flinging wide, the day is in the room ; the day with all the fresh scents of the early morning blown across fields and flower-beds, the day that is welcome to a child whether it comes smiling

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or weeping, in sunshine or in softly beating rain.

And there is the low-cushioned seat to curl up in, and the broad window-sill where you plant your elbows and look out across the world to the far, far line where another world joins it. How often I have sat so, when I was little, gazing and gazing and gazing till my eyes seem to have grown into a pair of telescopes that would have to be pressed tight and flat before my lids could shut again.

And you can put bowls of flowers there, strong, sturdy, velvety wall-flower that bursts into fragrance when the sun touches it; many coloured luminous sweet peas, with petals faintly veined as a baby's temples, and with a breath sweet as a baby's sigh. And sometimes Mrs. Mafferty (called so after the baker's wife who gave her to the cook, beloved) will come and wash her face upon your window-sill when the sun is shining. That is if you are respectful and do

ON PRINCES' HOUSES

not pull her tail too hard ; but you must remember that she has been the mother of many, and as such it is not honourable to affront her. I have seen her often on that window-ledge, and I think she likes it, because she can, at the same time as she is escaping from the cares of an exacting family, look down with indifference and unconcern upon certain of the dogs who, when they are all on equal ground together, do not yield to her that homage which is unquestionably her due.

You shall have all these joys, and many, many others. And to-day I am sending to town for patterns of all the loveliest chintzes that a gay metropolis, hanging upon the orders of princes and their mothers, can supply.

I *do* hope you will like the ones I choose, beloved.

II. ON A BOOK AND MRS. MAFFERTY

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O you know what I have been doing all the long warm afternoon, with your father away till dinner and not a sound in the house to disturb, except the canary flittering in his little cage upon the window-sill, which doesn't disturb at all, beloved, but only makes me feel that there's a nice little busy companion close by, who will look very wise if I want to know how to spell a word now and then, but who won't help me a bit?

I have been writing a story. Not copying one, you understand, but making it up out of my own head; and now that it is almost the shape I want it to be I am going to put it in the book I am making for you.

You haven't any idea what an interesting book that is going to be when it's finished; and as for the

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making of it, well, I can tell you it has kept me in a good temper and out of mischief many times since it was begun. And I know that if it hadn't been for such a 'normously interesting piece of work I might have been sorry for myself much oftener than I have been, because the price that I pay for being able to be sorry for other people is that I am able to be just as sorry for myself, which I know isn't considered quite the thing by the best people.

One day I said to Oliver, "Oliver, I think I'd like to make him a scrap-book; I had one when I was little, and I loved it." And he said, "By Jove! so had I. I wonder where it is now?" So the next time he was in town he went to the man who book-binds for me sometimes, and got one made exactly as I told him I wanted it. Of course, if it had just been made for a baby it would have been bound in blue (blue men, pink ladies), but as it is going to be for always I

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chose a beautiful soft, brown leather, that looks like the bowl of a pipe, ringed and curly in the grain—such as you will make a fuss to have yours when first you begin to smoke—and beautifully tooled on the edges. And on the fly-leaf I have written in my best handwriting

“ Little Oliver.

His Book.

Begun June, 19—”

I wanted it put on the outside in small, dull gold letters, but I felt rather shy asking the man to do it, because he knows Oliver, and perhaps he might laugh and think to himself, “ How does *she* know ? ” but I do know quite well, beloved, no matter who laughs.

In the book I have put all the little songs and scraps of verses and stories that I used to have told to me when *I* was young. There’s “ The Babes in the Wood,” beginning

“ For oh, don’t you know
That a long time ago
There were two little children
Whose names I don’t know.”

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And "Hush-a-by Baby," with the last verse that always, even now, makes me feel a little sad just as a beautiful sunset does.

"Hush-a-by, mother, rest in your chair,
Grown are the babes who needed your care."

And the story of the Three Trout Who Wanted To See The World, and the little German rhyme, the only bit of German that I ever learnt.

"Backe, Backe Kuchen, der Bäcker hat
gerufen
Wer will schöne Kuchen machen
Der muss haben sieben Sachen
Eier und Schmalz, Zucker und Salz,
Milch und Mehl, Safran macht den Kuchen
gehl."

Then there are all sorts of other things, gay coloured pictures of birds and stories of things that are happening now in this very wonderful world. Yesterday Oliver gave me a cutting about a new city that has been discovered, and another about an extraordinary stroke some one had made at golf. He took them out of the

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paper he was reading at breakfast, and handed them over to me.

"Those ought to interest him, I think," he said, very interested himself; and I could not help a little smile coming into my heart. I think it is so lovely that men are men and women are women.

This is my story, beloved, that I have made myself. It is called

"THE HAPPY FAMILY;
OR,
MRS. MAFFERTY AT HOME."

and I can't quite say I made it up *all* myself when I see Mrs. Mafferty there on the window-ledge; but although she gave me the idea I had to find the words myself, and you will admit, when you see what fine ones some of them are, that she never could have done anything like it, even if she had tried all day and all night for the whole of her nine lives.

THE HAPPY FAMILY, ETC.

At night they slept in a secluded corner of the broom cupboard. In the daytime

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they played in the sunshine or lay about in the doorway of the low red-tiled kitchen, getting under the feet of the ancient serving woman who cursed them laboriously and comprehensively for a misbegotten set of marauders, and daily stole fresh milk from the dairy that their graceless little bodies might prosper.

For beauty they could have no rivals, and the knowledge of that lighted the face of the mother with a glow of calm unassailable pride as she lay among them, apparently unconscious of their existence, yet alive to the very slightest movement of the reprobate who had retired from the immediate family circle to better consider the perpetration of hitherto untried villainies.

There were four of them, all dressed alike, in thick gray coats streaked with shining black. They wore spotless little socks and snowy white bibs, and every morning they were washed from head to foot by the careful mother who seemed to know no greater joy than the bearing and rearing of her splendid offspring. Every morning one might see her there in the sunshine tubbing her babies and brushing their hair. Sometimes one would object to

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being rolled over and turned about in such arbitrary fashion, and with a squeak would break away to join his brethren, but he was always brought back and held captive with a gentle but detaining paw till his toilet was completed. Or another, refusing to recognise the seriousness of the operations, would want to play with the sponge, and would try most desperately to entice his hard-working mother into the forgetfulness of her mission. Only when she saw the success of her plans being menaced would she resort to punishment; but, even in the boxing of his little wicked ears, she did not lose her gentleness; she was only doing what had to be done as patiently as possible.

After their bath they were allowed to play to their hearts' content. And how they played! Jumping, romping, turning, steeple-chasing over the body of the mother who lay stretched out with her eyes narrowed till she almost seemed asleep; seizing each other round the middles and kicking furiously with their hind feet till they had to stop for breath to go on again: buffetting the fool of the family, avoiding warily the knave; such games as never were, except in every other family of kittens that ever was born.

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All through their games ran the silver thread of a wise purpose. It was the kittens' kindergarten, and as they sprang and jumped, or lay stealthily waiting for the almost imperceptible movement of the extreme tip of the mother's tail, they were learning unconsciously the great work of life—the stalking of their future prey. Every now and then the mother would say something to them in a language jibed at and made ridiculous by the sons of men, but of a beautiful understanding to the sharp little ears for which it was intended ; and these happy children of a happy mother would answer with perfect comprehension in a faint squeaking echo of her own voice.

As the afternoon closed in, she would carry her babies one by one to bed. They were very fat and very heavy, and sometimes they didn't want to go to bed at all, and it made it that she had to pause very often in the many journeyings. But she was very patient. They were only helpless irresponsible babies, even though they were so fat and strong, and it would have been absurd to have expected them to find their way unaided up the step round the corner of the door and through the brooms to the

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night nursery at the back of the cupboard.

Only after they were fed and put to sleep would she allow herself real holiday. Then, when the last restless spirit had been subdued, when the wickedest and most wide awake of the lot had curled his tail round his head and closed his little bright eyes because he could not keep them open any longer, she would get up softly and make her way through the house to the sitting-room fire where she spent the rest of the evening devising plans for the welfare of her family and sleeping alternately.

I have watched her so brooding restfully and contentedly, like a woman whose hands have at last become idle after a busy day's work. And so she would sit, gazing into the fire. And I know, by the little song she was crooning to herself, that her babies were still in her mind.

That, beloved, is the story of the inner life of Mrs. Mafferty. Of course it won't keep you from pulling her tail when you see it waving about within reach; but perhaps later on it might make you refrain from throwing stones when you see her taking

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to her heels and scaling a wall for fear of you. No self-respecting dog would ever see a cat without at least having a try for it, but that is because dogs are absolutely governed by tradition. Once, centuries and centuries ago, a great canine ruler drew up a set of laws that were to govern all dogs for ever and ever and ever, and he ordered that these laws should be framed and hung up in every dog's mind till the time should come when dogs at last began to have no minds to hang them up in. They were—

“Love your master,
Honour the cook,
And chase every cat you ever see.”

From that time on every dog has faithfully followed the law, for fear, some say, that if he were to slacken in the least degree, it would prove at last what so many stupid people are always asserting—that dogs *have* no mind. Yet often I have seen a dog who had only half a mind to chase a cat. I have seen the thought come

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into his face, "Is it worth it?" and he has nearly sat down again; but the framed text hanging up in the little room behind his eyes have been too much for him, and he has had to go, even though he knew quite well that she would be safely in the tree long before ever he could get to her.

But you, my son, have no traditions like that to live up to; every one knows that men have minds.

And if you could have a mind to leave cats alone when you get into knickerbockers I'd be glad for Mrs. Mafferty's sake.

III. ON A MUSEUM

III. ON A MUSEUM



HERE is a tiny little room off your day nursery that was at first going to be made into another cupboard for the keeping of your linen. It is called the powder-closet, and was used by the byegone ladies, who hang in their gilt frames upon the dining-room walls, for the powdering of their magnificently pillowed hair. I can imagine them, can't you, beloved, sitting swathed in sheets, with their eyes tightly squeezed and their faces twisted up (like you when the barber is cropping you), while a dexterous handmaiden or a visiting *coiffeur* dabbed and puffed at the wonderful erections upon their heads. They look dears in their pictures, but they must have had rather a dull time of it when they lived in the country. They could never walk hatless along the windy ridges of the hills to watch

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the sun drop down, or crouch themselves upon the rug before the fire on winter nights with their heads against their Oliver's knees. They must have looked just too lovely for anything in the dark-panelled rooms, with a hundred wax candles lighting up the splendours of their velvets and brocades and jewels; and in the day-time, too, when they had their *fêtes* and walked the lawns in satin petticoats with looped-up gowns of painted muslin. And I'm very grateful to them for having had their portraits painted so; but I'm glad I belong to *this* time, when we wear coats and skirts by day and I can go with Oliver wherever he may go, yet be as gaudy and as fine as they when night comes on, with all the ease and comfort in the world.

The little room where they spent so much time "dolling" themselves, as old Nanny would say, is going to be turned into—*not* a linen-cupboard, beloved, because, as I say, there are

ON A MUSEUM

plenty of those already—but a *museum*, and Oliver and old Jonas are busy getting it ready with all their hands and with all their hearts. Old Jonas is a real carpenter, and lives upon the place, and Oliver knows a good deal about it, although I don't think he's ever earned any money by it, so between the two, with me to interfere, if you don't get the best private museum that was ever made out of a powder-closet it won't be for want of strong and sincere co-op-er-ation. Take *that* in little bits and think over it.

I got the idea from a boys' school a little while ago, when Oliver and I went to see Mary Luttrell's Jack—you will meet him some day—who was having mumps at his school not very far away from here, and was secretly very miserable away from his mother. Mumps are a beastly thing to have *with* a mother, but without they must be awful. Oliver tipped him half a sovereign, and I took him

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some hardbake for the boys and some old stamps for himself, and before we left he had quite brisked up. It was then he asked me if we would like to see the museum, and as the room he was in was just next door, he took us in and showed us over. He seemed very proud of it, and I don't wonder. There were all sorts of jolly things the boys had either gathered or made themselves, and each thing was labelled with a little printed ticket, on which was written the date and the name of the boy who had given it. In between the spasms of the mumps he—Jack—had been making a model of a hayloft with a little ladder that let down and up, and the master told me afterwards that it had shortened his misery by a very long spell. You do want something to take your thoughts off your jaws when the mumps has got into them. You'll know it, poor lamb, some day.

When the foreman said, opening the door of the powder-room, "And

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this, fitted up, will make an excellent linen-cupboard," I thought so too, and nodded my head. But after dinner that night, when we were having coffee, and I was thinking very hard over all the happenings of the day, the thought of the museum came into my head.

"Oliver," I said, "I don't want that made into a linen-cupboard; there are heaps of linen-cupboards already. I'd like to make it into a museum."

"A *what?*" said Oliver, as if he had not heard aright.

"A museum; like the one Mary Luttrell's Jack showed us at his school. You remember?"

The recollection came to him slowly, but when it came he was as pleased as a boy.

"I say, what a ripping idea!" He stood on the hearthrug and looked down at me with an expression in his eyes that always makes me happy and comfortable, a sort of wrapping-me-

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round expression that is made up of all the kind and tender and pleasant thoughts that belong to his mind.

"You're a frightfully clever person, Margie," he said banteringly, yet with the tenderness deepening in his eyes.

I tried not to look too pleased.

"I am, aren't I? Take my cup away and come and sit beside me while we talk about it. You've got a pencil and a piece of paper?"

He sat down on the sofa and pulled an envelope out of his breast pocket.

"This'll do," he said, carefully tearing a blank sheet off the letter that was inside; then he took his pencil off his chain, and when he had made it ready to write with, he looked up at me. "Why are you smiling?"

"I don't know," I said; "it always interests me to watch men do things."

"Why?" he asked, looking down at the things in his hands as if he were seeing them for the first time.

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“Because you are so calm and so deliberate over everything you do with your hands. You aren’t deft or nippy, but you get there just the same, and you are so beautifully *majestic*. I think it is very nice of you to be so different from us.” I squeezed his hand, and then patted it (he has lovely, hard, strong hands, beloved). “Now let’s make a plan.”

We made the most beautiful plan, and in another week everything will be quite finished. There has been an elegant top light put in because the room was very dark; and all round the walls there are cupboards as high as a table for you to put your toys in. You aren’t going to have a *normous* number of toys, because I don’t want you to be a bored baby, and there are lots of babies get bored because they have so many things to love that they never have time to love one in particular—for no baby, let me tell you, has ever known what it is to love truly till he has loved one rabbit

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or one doll or one monkey in particular. That is how I am with your father.

As for your toys, you shall have nice, soft furry things to hug when you are very little; they must be soft, so that when you go to sleep on top of them they won't stick into you. But as you get older, you'll "make up" most of your pleasures yourself. There's not *half* the fun to be got out of the grandest model of a motor or a carriage money can buy, that there is out of the entrancing chariot you make yourself with two nursery chairs and a skipping rope tied round the ramping neck of a snorting rocking-horse—your father's rocking-horse, my son, which now already champs his bit and paws the rockers in anticipation of the call that is going to take him into action once more.

Whenever I hear of the poor millionaire babies having some new and expensive wonderfulness invented

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for their overstocked pleasure-houses I think of the story of the boy who was given a beautiful railway complete in every detail. There were the rails and the semaphores and the train and the engine drivers and the porters and the passengers — every single thing you could think of. And he listened attentively all the while it was being explained to him. Then, when there was nothing left to tell he turned to his mother and said very sadly, “And what’ll *I* be?”

You aren’t going to be starved like that, beloved. You are going to be the horse and the rider and the captain and the crew; and the gallant youth who lies manacled but undismayed in the sweltering cock-pit, and the hook-nosed pirate who put him there. Oh, I see such a life before you! Lying doggo in the trenches by the hawthorn hedges, storming the bastioned towers of the cowsheds and holding the bridges of the trout streams against all the unbeaten foes

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of a universe who have buried their differences for once and joined together, that, united, they may rid themselves of the stripling who laughs defiance at them. Do they? My beloved, we smile together. With such a one to hold, and such a foe to fight, it has never been done yet, in all the world.

But to get back to the museum—I do wander, don't I?—On the top of the cupboards are little glass cases such as you see in real museums, and some are lined with green to make the things show up better, and others—the ones where you will put your butterflies and such-like—are lined with white.

We have already begun to put some things in, although all the cases aren't quite finished yet—but it was so lovely to think of doing it that I couldn't wait. When I told Oliver I wanted to, he laughed and said, "All right, let's see what we've got." But I didn't take much notice of his

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laughing, because I've watched men with my inside eyes long enough to know that they laugh at such times more to show their manness than because they think we are silly. Underneath everything Oliver is just as silly as I am, and that's saying a good deal, isn't it?

Most of my things have gone into the green one, and most of Oliver's into the white one. We have written our own tickets, but his are better than mine because he writes better for one thing, and because he is used to writing with a thin pen, and I always use a thick one. But I've tried very hard over them, so, even if they don't quite come up to Oliver's, you'll know it isn't because I didn't put my back into it.

We neither of us showed what we'd got till the things were labelled and set out properly. First Oliver did his and covered the cases he had used with paper; then I went in and did the same, and after that I came

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out, and we both went in together and made the grand tour.

We had not a great many things to begin with ; but that is just as it should be, because it is going to be your museum, and *you* must do the collecting for it.

Oliver took me with great ceremony to his cases and carefully removed the paper. In one case was a large brown moth—caught near the lamp in the drawing-room one night about a month ago —and a very beautiful butterfly called the Painted Lady. In another a curious piece of stone that looks like the queer figures that the Chinese carved in jade or soap-stone. We picked it up in Brittany one summer. And in another the Struvelpeter of his childhood, and a portrait of me at the age of four, very cross, *very* sulky, with my cheeks blown out like a musical cherub's and my hair hanging in little drakes' tails round my neck. I had white hair when I was four, beloved.

ON A MUSEUM

I looked at it and laughed; under it was written :

“Portrait of the owner’s mother at the age of four. Kindly lent by Oliver T., Esq.”

“You are very generous with your old masters,” I said. “Now come to my side.”

I had a thimble with a hole in it, called :

“Thimble used by the mother of the owner in the making of his kit and disabled in the service;” a broken coral and bells that belonged to my own mother; a brown bear, caught somewhere on Ludgate Hill about Christmas time (of the cotton wool variety, and cost a penny), and a pair of your father’s shoes when he was a baby, not very much worn on the soles, but very much chewed in the toes. The sight of those shoes always brings him before me as no other telling could. I know exactly how he spent his time then. No diary left behind could tell more of a

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man's early occupations and pleasures than do those two little scraps of crinkled white kid, and while they exist he can never hope to have any private life—in *that* epoch, at any rate.

I looked round the room with a sigh of content.

"I am very happy, Oliver," I said, stroking the lapel of his coat.

For a while he stood looking down at me with the quiet searching look that sometimes comes into his eyes. He was so long over it that I smiled. "What is it?" I asked.

He did not answer, but he bent down swiftly and kissed me, holding me the while very tightly.

If any one else had married him I don't know *what* I should have done.

I have had to open this to tell you something.

Yesterday, Oliver was in the museum putting some more finishing touches to it, and I was sitting in an easy-chair in the nursery, just on the

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other side of the door, sewing and talking with him as he worked. There was a knock upon the outer door, and old Jonas appeared carrying a ship in a glass case. He held it out to me.

"I don't know, ma'am, whether you'll accept it, but it's the model I made of the first ship I went to sea in, and I thought p'raps it might go well in the museum 'ere, if you'd be pleased to 'ave it." He waited expectantly. I put out my hands for it.

"Oh, Jonas, how lovely! Look, Oliver!"

Oliver came out of the museum and stood in the doorway.

"Hullo, Jonas," he said; "why, that's the ship I used to throw sheep's eyes at when I was a boy."

Old Jonas looked very pleased.

"Well, yes; I made it in 'sixty-one, sir, and *that's* a few years afore you was born."

"Not many," said Oliver, laughing: then he took it out of my hands

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

and began to examine it closely. "Gad! How I used to long to have it to finger in the early days; I'd have given my ears for it. Where shall we put it?" He turned and went back into the museum; Jonas followed.

"Are you sure you don't mind parting with it, Jonas?" I said quickly. It touched me very much that he should want to give it, for it had stood on his mantelpiece for fifty years, and I felt he might be lonely without it.

"Why, no, ma'am," he said jovially. "I've 'ad my fun makin' it, and I've been lookin' at it for 'alf a century, and it isn't as if I was really goin' to part with it. P'raps, sometimes, the little master'll ask me in to 'ave a look at it if I get a 'ankerin'." He laughed, and a look came into his old eyes that made his rough stubbly face seem young and beautiful to me. It was the look that comes into old faces when they see young

ON A MUSEUM

things, and I felt a rush of tears in my throat.

And he had said, "the little master,"
beloved !

I could not speak.

IV. ON AN
ENDLESS CHAIN

IV. ON AN ENDLESS CHAIN



WONDER how old you are when you are reading this! Are you a boy at school, or a young man at college, and are you thinking what a stupid old mother it is who writes letters because she is afraid she won't get a chance to talk any other way, and then stays on to worry a fellow's life out about under-flannels and midnight oil and other things of the same kind that haven't anything to do with life at all? Or are you reading rather thoughtfully, wondering what it could have been like to have had a real mother who did the things that I could only talk about; a real mother, with a real lap to bury your head in when things were going badly, and real eyes to smile your heart up out of your boots while you held on to the dentist's chair with all your unhappy little might?

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

Something happened to-day that seemed in a way to set me far from you, and yet to bring the whole world very near.

It didn't set me far from you inasmuch as loving you was concerned—nothing could do that—but it made me feel that, instead of being the centre of the universe (because I loved Oliver and was going to have you), I was only one little link in a chain that had been going on for ever, and *would* go on, for ever, and ever, and ever.

It happened this way. Just before I went up to dress for dinner I remembered a list I wanted to look through. It really wasn't a bit necessary to go and hunt for it then, but when I want to do a thing, I want to do it at that very moment, or not at all. It shows a sad lack of balance, I know, but I've given up worrying about *that*, long ago. If I wait till the right time arrives, I can wait for ever and always, but if I do it when

ON AN ENDLESS CHAIN

the impulse seizes me, I may do it at awkward hours, but I *do* it. See, beloved? We are all such very different shapes and sizes, that we have got to find the best way we can of folding ourselves up to fit the Box, and I think that is the best way for me. It's the nicest, too.

The list was not on the writing-table in the bedroom, and I looked through the drawers in the dressing-table, but I could not find it there. Then I remembered that I had been looking at it one day at lunch, and it was very likely in the big old bureau in the dining-room.

I went down and hunted, first in the pigeon-holes and then in the little drawers underneath. At last I came to one that would not open properly; something had got stuck in the roof of it, and it would only move ever such a little bit. I tried it all ways, kindly, sharply, quickly, slowly, insinuatingly, imperiously—all the ways one has to waggle and wriggle a

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

drawer that has taken into its stupid wooden head to be uncommunicative, contrary, and altogether exasperating.

At last, a little jerk, no cleverer and no wiser than any of the jerks I had given it before, loosened the thing that was stopping it, and the drawer came out. The list was there. I took it up, and was going to put the drawer back, when I saw that the place underneath, where it was fitted, was hollow.

A secret drawer, beloved! I put my fingers in and fished round. There was something in it!

Very carefully, but feeling very excited, I pulled out a little packet, wrapped in white, shiny paper and tied with a faded blue ribbon that broke like tinder when I tried to untie it; then when I had felt round the drawer once more to make sure that nothing had been left in the corners, I unwrapped the parcel very gently, and spread the contents out upon the

ON AN ENDLESS CHAIN

desk. There were five things, a little piece of bead-work, a baby's cap, a baby's shoe, a lock of a man's hair, and a tarnished silver flower; and on a half-sheet of note-paper, in faded ink, written in the faint sloping Italian hand of a byegone fashion, was an inventory of this precious hoarding:

Cap, made by me for my little son's christening. November 16th, 1834—Oliver John.

His shoe when he was one year and eight months old.

Piece of bead-work done by Mary Caroline at the age of ten.

My dear husband's hair, cut off and sent to me, the night before going into action. 1837.

A flower from my wedding-wreath.

One by one I took them up and looked at them.

The little cap of yellowed cambric, made so exquisitely and so *invisibly* that the cobwebs gathered for you must have stirred jealously in their lavender strewn beds—and the funny

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

little glazed shoe—they belonged to Oliver's father, who had done many dusty weary marches under blazing suns, before he had come at last to enjoy the peace and quiet of the home and land he had given his youth to serve: and the lock of hair to *his* father, who had sent it the night before he was shot, to the wife who waited in vain for her man to come back.

All at once the pictures in their frames became alive. They were not any more just paintings to decorate a wall, or ancestors to swell one's pride, they were men and women, with hopes and fears, and loves and hates; with quick beating hearts, small vanities, and great endurances. Oh! I have laughed before at their mincings and prancings, their hoops and their chignons, I had pitied their women because they couldn't wear coats and skirts as we can, and sit on the hearthrug and rest their powdered head-dresses upon their Olivers' knees; but I had laughed too soon, and pitied without

ON AN ENDLESS CHAIN

thinking. The quaint old lady I had known a year before her death, was the slip of a girl in the oval gold frame, who had bent her pretty brown head over the baby's cap she was so exquisitely embroidering, a little more than seventy-five years ago. She was your great-grandmother, and the cap was for your grandfather, who died when Oliver, your father, came back from Magersfontein. She was a wife at seventeen, a mother at eighteen, and a widow at twenty-one. And twenty years after her husband's death she kissed the boy who had helped her to bear her widowhood, and sent him off, a man, to do the work his father did before him. Oh, my son, the wives and mothers of soldiers, who sit at home and wait! the world is a very great one!

So she had sat, as I now, making her baby-clothes and dreaming her dreams: and later, when her reality had become a dream, and her dream a reality, she gave herself to the new

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

young life that embodied in its own so much of the man who had been taken from her, and she lived again, to renew afresh at middle age, in the child that came to *her* child.

What a chain! but how it linked up the world!

There was old great-granny, a girl in her teens, yet a wife with a baby to think of, learning to keep her house and prepare for her family. And I know now, that although she looked a very serene damsel in her frills and furbelows upon the wall, yet she worried just as much as I do when she couldn't match her laces, or her soufflés went all wrong. And the little tarnished flower from her wreath was no different from the crushed bit of orange blossom that lies in my drawer, and the splendid gentleman with the dangling sword was her "dear husband," as Oliver is mine, and thought of her when he was away from her, just as Oliver does of me.

ON AN ENDLESS CHAIN

I went round the room and looked at the pictures. The great-granny and the great-grandfather, the little Mary Caroline, who looked a fearsome lady in her frame, but who I knew must have got a few chastenings, and wept a few tears before she had been able to do such a lovely piece of bead-work at ten ; the beauty, as the Watteau shepherdess, whose husband had been Ambassador at the Court of France, when poor Marie Antoinette and her ladies were playing gaily at being dairymaids and millers' daughters in the gardens of the Trianon ; the one-armed admiral, with his ship tossing in the lightning-lit background—they were not pictures, they were flesh and blood : and some day the time would come when a woman would stand and look at *me* in my frame, and wonder what it was like to live in *those* days. Oh, it is good to feel the world real, but it frightens one to feel one's self unreal.

I shut the desk quickly, and

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

ran back to my room. Oliver was there.

“Hullo,” he said, “aren’t you dressed yet? I thought you’d gone down.”

I went and stood *under* him.

“I am not dressed, and I have been down, but that does not matter. Put your arms round me.”

He smiled. “Is that right?”

“Yes, it is better. Do I seem real to you?”

The smile deepened; but I felt him hold me just a little bit tighter.

“Yes.”

“Quite real?”

“Quite real.”

I drew a deep, deep breath and put up my hand and stroked his face; that made me begin to feel real to myself.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Nothing much,” I said, “only your family downstairs, and it frightened me a bit. Do you love me?”

ON AN ENDLESS CHAIN

"Yes." When he says "yes" like that, it gives me a queer, savage little pain at my heart. He held me away from him, and looked down into my eyes. "*Do you love me, Margie?*" The smile had left his face. I looked back at him.

"No," I said, with a catch in my voice; and he held me to him and kissed me fiercely.

When I found the little treasure-trove in the bureau, my first thought was, "What a beautiful present for the museum!"

But as I handled them they grew so living that it would have been a violation to have taken them from the quiet place in which they had lain so long, and to think of separating and labelling them would have been sacrilege. I did not even tell Oliver I had found them, but when he went to the smoking-room after dinner, I stayed behind and put them away. Very softly, so as not to brush the

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

bloom off them, I laid them in their wrappings. And when they were all there together, I bent down and breathed a kiss and the thought of a prayer over them. They were such gentle, tender things, beloved, that to have disturbed their sleeping was almost as if one had broken in upon a nun's praying.

When you come upon them, you will treat them very gently, won't you?

V. ON A HOUSE
WARMING

V. ON A HOUSE WARMING



OUR Highness's apartments are ready. From the curtains to the pin-cushion there is not a thing wanting. A handsome parquet floor (made of cork, so that it can have its face washed as often as yours will be, if necessary) has soft rosy carpets over it to keep it warm; the little short curtains are of book muslin, so that they may not shut out the light, and the long ones are of warm pink damask.

Excuse me getting damask, beloved, after I had said chintz; but you are to have damask for the winter, and chintz for the summer. I have kept three of the patterns out of the ones I sent for, because I couldn't make up my mind which to choose; so one day, about April-time, when you will

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

be quite old enough to choose for yourself, they shall be brought out and put before you, and whichever you clutch first, will of course be the one you want. Isn't that a lovely way of making up my mind?

Nurse has been to see her room, and she is enchanted with it. As for her, I think you will like her very much, although it will be no use your falling in love with her, because she's got a young man already. He's a doctor in the country, and they can't get married yet awhile because they haven't enough money. Oh, my son, I know I've got a black heart, but if only they will stay too poor till you are a year old, I will give her all her trousseau and half her house-linen. Only don't tell her I said that or she'll despise me utterly.

The rocking-horse stands in his stall, which is a gap between the linen-cupboard and the wall in the day nursery. Oliver has been trying to do him up a bit, and the other day he

A HOUSE WARMING

bought a new glass eye for him, and stuck it in himself. But it isn't quite a success, because when he was buying it, he wasn't sure of the size, and had quite forgotten the colour, so it doesn't match the old one, and it's rather too big and bulges in a way that makes it look as if it were just going to fall out. It won't fall out, beloved, if you will only leave it alone, but I suppose, if you are able to get your finger on a good working level with it, there won't be any more chance for it than there will be for Mrs. Mafferty's tail when it is waving about handy. Only don't eat it—the eye—*please*, my son.

There are no pictures upon the walls, but I found a little illuminated verse done on vellum the other day, at an exhibition of work, and I bought it to hang over your bed. It is just a little thought about the Man they called Jesus, and whenever I read it, I see Him bending kindly towards the babies who clamoured round Him,

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

the babies that He would not allow to
be turned away.

“There was a Knight of Bethlehem
Whose wealth was tears and sorrows ;
His men-at-arms were little lambs,
His trumpeters were sparrows ;
His castle was a wooden cross,
Whereon He hung so high ;
His helmet was a crown of thorns
Whose crest did touch the sky.”

Isn't that sweet, my little baby ?

This is scarcely long enough to be called a letter, it is a sort of lighting the fire in the rooms prepared for you. I hope you will be *very* comfortable, and if you haven't got everything you want, just cry for it, as Nanny used to say whenever I went to stay with her in Clarges Street—only she said “ring,” instead of “cry.”

Bless you, bless you, bless you ! I kiss the back of your soft little neck as I say it.

I am very happy.

VI. ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

VI. ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE



MY son, I have had *the* most wearing afternoon, and now that it is all over I am very glad indeed to find that there isn't a word of truth in it—for a while at any rate.

Of course the trouble was all to do with you, and of course it happened when I was sewing one of those long, straight seams that are to my thoughts what the road across the Salisbury Plains is to a man with a motor. With enough petrol and that long white ribbon to run on, he simply eats up time and distance even as I with two selvedges and no fancy stitches to make live whole life-times between the waist and the hem.

This time, beloved, you were getting married. It was no use my saying I liked it, because I didn't. I *hated* it. I knew that it would have

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

to happen some day, but the some day one doesn't want one always puts a conveniently long distance off. And I had been lulled into a false sense of security by your charming behaviour to all the girls in the country round, the girls that Oliver and I had thought of as possible helpmeets for you in the years to come.

At five I chose your wife gaily; at fifteen I commended the gallant way you watched the plate of the blue-eyed twelve-year-old with the long legs and the pigtail who rode races with you over the downs and raided the cook on baking days. But at twenty—at twenty the time began to draw in, and that which one had jested about was no longer a jesting matter. Then it was that I began to look with apprehensive eyes upon whatsoever girls were pretty, whatsoever girls were charming, and whatsoever girls you danced with more than twice. But after a while

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

I gave up troubling. You were so nice to them all that peace came to me again. Once or twice, when you were walking across to the tennis ground, I felt a little contraction at my heart as I watched you. You looked so like your father did when I first knew him, and you had that same quick, interested way of turning to the girl you were talking to, that it gave me a pain. The heart of man and of woman is so curiously complex and intricate that such a feeling as came with the sight of you then is not easily explained. It was jealousy, yet I was your mother, and I knew that no one could take that away from me. I was not jealous as your mother. Still, for the moment, the girl in the wide-brimmed hat was my enemy. Perhaps it was that you were so much a part of Oliver and you looked so ridiculously like him that I was jealous of the Oliver in you that I knew was inevitably going out sooner or later to find his happiness

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

in another woman. It was only momentary, only a flash, or a lifting of the curtain, but in that moment I *saw*, and it hurt my heart. Men have that jealousy of their daughters. I suppose it is the price one has got to pay for caring very much, because everything that is worth having has got to be paid for. But if one can only remember in time that everything worth having is worth paying for, one learns—in time—to pay with an air, and not to haggle.

Very nearly at that moment I was going to haggle ; then, just in time, I reared my head, and even as I reared my head the feeling vanished. I was your mother and you were my son, and to allow my mind to be disturbed by corroding thoughts was to dishonour my high estate. The knowledge that I had been singled out for that unique and wonderful position ought to give me strength to bear its penalties. There would have to be a girl in a broad-brimmed hat some

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

day, and if I was afraid of her I had no right to bring into the world that which, if it were as complete as it should be, would demand mightily, with the body and soul of it, a girl in a broad-brimmed hat.

Just as I was rearing my head and standing proudly upon the apex of my own nobility, you waved your racquet and shouted :

“Hullo, mum ; come and pour out the tea !” and I jumped down off my nobility and began to walk about in the garden of my happiness again. It wasn't *this* girl in the broad-brimmed hat, at any rate.

And so the time went on. You were very busy learning to be a soldier, and every now and then we had dazzling visions of you in your uniform when we came up to town, and sometimes when you were not too hard-pressed, there was the joy of welcoming you home. Then it was, I think, that my cup of happiness was quite full. To hear you singing in

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

your bath before breakfast, to look out of my window and see you walking bareheaded in the garden with the dogs frisking about at your heels and the sun shining down on your close-cropped hair; to call to you and to hear your dear voice call back: "Hurry up, mother, I'm starving," and to see you and your father start off together on your horses, you erect and brown, your father erect and grizzled; both with your heads on a level, yet always to me the big and the little Oliver, though *you* should grow as great as Goliath himself.

They were serene years, clouded only by too long absences, but you had to make your way, and there was the joy of watching you make it. Then came one day the news that was going to make such a difference to the strength and power and position of the British Empire. You had been gazetted captain, and—this did not matter quite so much to the Empire,

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

but very much to me—you were coming home for a week.

After I had sat gloating over the precious line of print in the paper and had read it backwards and upside down, and left it for political and court information, that I might have an excuse to come across it again, I kissed your father.

“Thank you, Oliver,” I said.

He looked surprised.

“What for?” he asked.

“For such a son,” I said.

“Indeed, thank *you*, Margie,” he said, not to be outdone in politeness, and as gravely as you please. He’s a very polite man, your father, and *such* a beautiful one to make a jest with.

When breakfast was over, I went to see to your rooms. They were the old nurseries fitted up for a man, and the orris-root had given way to tobacco, and the toys were stacked away in the cupboards under the museum cases. But the little verse

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

was still hanging at your bed-head and the rocking-horse was prancing away to himself in his stable in the study.

There had been a long discussion once as to what should happen to him. He was too big to go into the museum with the rest of the childish things, yet it seemed cruel to send him off to a lonely old age in the attic. When you came back from college we talked the matter over weightily, looking at him as we talked. His eye had gone again, and he had grown a ramping tail of grey worsted, copied by me, as faithfully as possible, from David's picture of Napoleon curvetting over the Alps, for that period when the spirit of the mighty little Corsican had entered *your* militant little body to live over his old triumphs and fight his old battles in a nursery corner of that country he desired so much to make his own.

"He's too big for the museum," I said.

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

"Yes," said you, without offering any alternative.

"He'd be awfully dull by himself in the attic," I went on; and you nodded.

"Shall we give him away?" I suggested; and you turned a shocked face towards me.

"*Give him away*, mum! He belonged to father!"

I smiled. "I wouldn't give him away if he was all that was left to feed a starving garrison with," I said; "but where is he going to live?"

We looked round the room and then at one another.

"Let him stay where he is, there's lots of room," said you; and there he stayed, one-eyed, worsted-tailed, and happy, to await the time till—I shut the door quickly and went to give the orders for your coming.

When nothing more could possibly be thought of for your rooms, I paid a visit to the stables to tell them to be sure and have your dog washed,

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

then I went upstairs to look at my gowns. There were to be all sorts of festivities during your week, and a dance the night of your arrival was one of them. That night I was going to look my very greatest and grandest; heavy, creamy satin, with your grandmother's Carrickmacross and all my emeralds, *and* my big and my little Oliver. Would it be any wonder if I carried my head finely!

The dance was a tremendous success. Oliver and I had not given up dancing, although I was half-way between fifty and sixty, and Oliver ten years older. Of course we danced more quietly than the young things did, but the zest was still there. And it was a proud woman I was when I walked through the room with you and your father beside me, and a happy one when you fought with him for the right of opening the ball with me.

When I was not dancing I watched you, and my heart was full of a great,

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

generous pity for all the girls who would have to do without you when you finally married one. Of course I wouldn't have *talked* so to you for worlds, but now I am telling you my own inside thoughts. All mothers are stupid like that, and as long as they don't let it stick out too far, it doesn't matter in the least, as it pleases them most awfully.

I couldn't help wondering a little, too, how it was that you could escape being head over ears in love with one or two of the girls there that night, because there were some lovely ones and one or two as sweet as they were lovely. Ah, beloved, if I had but known what armour you were wearing, I would not have been so easy !

The dance was over very late, and I stayed in bed to breakfast. You came in to say good morning, and sat talking for a little while before you went down. There were so many things to talk about that a week seemed no time at all. The days

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

would go by like lightning, and you would be away again before I had said half the things I wanted to say, or heard half the things you had to tell me.

The gong sounded a second time.

"We mustn't talk any longer," I said, "or else Oliver will be having his breakfast alone. Now go."

You got up from the end of the bed where you had been sitting, and I watched you as you went, tall and straight and strong. I was very glad because of you.

"Mother." With the door half-opened, you stopped. I looked up quickly.

"Yes?"

There was a moment's pause, and you came back across the room and stood looking down into my face; then you stooped and kissed me.

"Dear little mum," you said very gently, holding my face between your hands.

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

. . . I sat up, staring out in front of me long after you had gone out of the room. You had something that you wanted to tell me, and it was no scrape to be confessed, no difficulty in which you needed my counsel. I knew that by the sound of your voice. You had often before said, "dear little mum," but never like that. As you said it, places seemed to change, and I felt myself outside the gate of knowledge, while you were on the other side with the key in your pocket. I felt suddenly cold and desolate outside, but I dreaded more than everything the thought of going inside. Love makes one clairvoyant, and I saw everything in that moment when you stood holding my face in your hands and looking into my eyes. But I would not see : perhaps I was wrong, perhaps I was only imagining. I got up quickly, and made myself too busy to hear my own thoughts.

All that day I would give you no

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

chance of being alone with me. You and Oliver came back to lunch. In the afternoon there was a tea-party five miles away. You wanted to shirk it, and Oliver, always watchful and careful over me, suggested that it would be better for me to stay at home and go to sleep after the fatigue of the dance. I would not hear of it. We must all go; the people were expecting us; they would be disappointed. And you both laughed and called me an old gadder, and went up dutifully to dress.

We motored over. Spinning along in the fresh air, some of my fears got blown away. After all, I had really nothing to go upon except my own imagination, and one knows how often that runs away with one. Many, many times, I had almost made real things that had no foundation at all. . . . I was too fearful.

But when I thought of the evening alone with Oliver and you, I hadn't courage enough for it, and we carried

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

back three more in the car than we had started out with.

It was a gay dinner-table, and I behaved quite nicely outside; but I was only able to do it by keeping my eyes turned away from you. For something had happened that brought all my fears upon me again, and this time without a shadow of a doubt to shelter in. As we came through the hall before dinner, the letters were just arriving. I took them all and dealt them out. There were some for me, some for Oliver, and four for you. Two looked like bills; but one, in a big, oblong envelope, was unmistakably a woman's handwriting. Very quickly you put it in your pocket, and opened the others slowly. I wasn't prying, but I would have seen that if my eyes had been shut three times over.

I glanced through my own and opened one, but I didn't see what was in it.

"A nice post?" I said, looking up

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

from my letter, with a smile that it gave me pain in every part of my body to make.

“Not much; bills and an invitation.” You very carefully fitted the invitation into its envelope and put your arm through mine. We went into the drawing-room so.

All the evening I could see nothing, think of nothing but the oblong letter lying quiet and hidden in your pocket. It was lying there till you could read it alone. Some one had come at last who was more to you than I was. The moment had to come to me as to all other mothers; in imagination, I had faced it often. I had approached it hesitatingly, wisely, reluctantly, courageously, but all the preparation in the world made no difference, was no help, when the real moment came. One trains one's self to attack and one is surprised sleeping.

When every one had gone, you came to say good night. I had held

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

you off all day, now you held yourself off. For the first time in your life there was a feeling of constraint between us, and the more I longed to break it down the stronger it seemed to grow.

"Good night, mother." You kissed me and stood for a moment by the dressing-table. "That's rather a jolly ring."

"Your father gave it to me when we were married. Are you sure you have everything you want in your room?"

"Yes, everything, thank you. You'll be down to breakfast in the morning?"

"Yes, good night, dear."

"Good night." We kissed again, and you went to your room.

I undressed slowly, putting everything away precisely and folding everything carefully. To do things with one's hands is a relief to one's mind.

When Oliver came up I was in

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

bed, and he went softly across to his dressing-room for fear of waking me.

"I am not asleep," I said; and he began to talk as he undressed.

"The lad's looking very well, Margie, don't you think?"

"Very well." Indeed, I had scarcely been able to take my eyes away from your splendidity from the moment you came into the house.

"And Carter tells me he's going to make a keen man at his job. I'm glad of that."

"If he is anything like you, I shall be satisfied, Oliver."

He came swiftly to the bedside and looked down at me.

"Bless you, little Margie," he said, taking my hands in his.

Long after I could hear him breathing regularly I lay awake staring out into the moonlit room. I thought of you. You as a helpless little thing with clutching fingers, as a proud and staggering baby making your first

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

steps alone, as a sturdy boy at school, as a young man going out into the world for the first time. In all things you had turned to me and to Oliver, and to me alone in the very first months. And I had made sacrifices that a man never dreams of as sacrifices. When the barber came in to shear your head and make a man of you I had smiled with you in your pride, and I had told him with a laugh—a laugh to cover up my heart with, beloved—to cut them carefully one by one so that I should not lose any. But when he was gone and you had rushed away to show yourself to the cook, I wrapped them up slowly and carefully, and just for a moment, before I put them away, I held them against my breast. So many times they had rested there, I could not believe they never would again.

And once I took them out of their wrapping to look at them again. It was the day you went to boarding-school. I had stood and waved you

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out of sight ; then, when the dog-cart had disappeared round the bend of the road, I went back along the drive and into the quiet, empty house. And I went straight to the drawer where the curls were, beloved, and I just held them in my hands and looked and looked and looked at them. And the tears welled up in my eyes till I couldn't see, and they ran down my cheeks like they used to when I was little, only then I used to lick them in, and this time they dropped all over the curls, and I kept on saying over and over again, "Keep the little thing clean, O God ; keep the little thing clean." And then at last I smiled and put them back in the drawer and went away with my head up. And the pain in my heart, instead of being a black one, was a golden one. I knew you were going to be all right.

And always you had come to me frankly in your joys and your sorrows. I had shared your excitement in that

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ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

astounding week when you were first in your form, and we had mourned together over the sudden and tragic death of the guinea-pig. I had soothed your fevers as a child, and helped you to overcome your tempers. Now again in your manhood you were bringing your confidence to me, and for the first time I was failing you. To-day, as we had stood alone for a moment in the garden, you had said, "Mother, I would like to speak to you about something," and with a smile on my lips and a blur before my eyes, I had managed to put you off. You felt it without actually knowing it, and a barrier had risen up between us. An interrupted confidence is not easily regained. I, through my own jealousy and selfishness was losing one of the two greatest things in my world. I could not bear it. I would go now to you and tell you, in the small hours of the morning, with my repentance hot upon me, how sorry I was. I would make you

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forgive me, and take me back as a real mother.

But as I would have risen to go to you something held me back. Once, before you were born, I had had an unhappiness with Oliver. Through my imaginings I had made myself to suffer very much, but at last I had gone and poured myself out to him, and everything had become beautiful again.

With you it was different. The impulse to go there and then to you and to make things right by confessing myself wrong was perhaps a decent one, but it was at the same time a selfish one. Oliver was my man, and I was in trouble. I told him, and he just put his arms round me and understood, and nothing was wrong any more. But you were my child, and to go to you so would be to make a situation. You would be called upon to suffer the uncomfortable embarrassment of forgiving your mother, and ever afterwards the

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ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

remembrance of it would belong to that part of your life. Perhaps not consciously, but still consciously enough to make you stop to consider first before you told me anything else that might bring the penalty with it again. Oliver could forgive me forty times over without it mattering, because that is what he's there for, but to make you do it once in real earnest would be to break a joyous communion. I longed to set things right, but I must find the right way to do it, and it was not that.

And as I lay thinking, other fears beset me. It would be hard enough to give you up to the best woman, but supposing she were not the best? Supposing she were enticing, yet cold and careless and without honour. Supposing she were beautiful of face yet unlovely in her heart. Supposing she made you suffer and humiliated you. . . .

Oliver's hand sought mine.

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

"Margie, why aren't you sleeping?"

I moved nearer him and held his hand close.

"I can't, and oh, I am frightened sometimes!"

He drew me very near him.

"Is it the boy?"

A sob caught in my throat.

"Poor little mother-bird," he said tenderly; "but he's got to fly one day, Margie."

"I know, I know."

"And whatever happens, the thing that matters is the *way* he flies, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes, but I can't bear that he should be hurt," I said, with the tears running down.

In the still, quiet night, Oliver gathered me close to him.

"He's ours, Margie," he said, "but if you had to choose, would you rather that he should hurt or be hurt?"

"I don't want either," I sobbed.

"But if it had to be?"

And at last, as I answered, my tears

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

stopped, and I felt myself growing calm and quiet, and although I was lying in Oliver's arms, I felt as if I were standing up very straight and tall.

"That he were hurt, Oliver." I clung to his hand very tight.

He did not speak, but he kissed me.

"Now sleep," he said.

"I do love you so very much," I said, the last thing before I slept.

In the morning when I was dressed, I opened my window wide. You were walking down among the flowers, waiting for breakfast. I called to you.

"Wait there for me and we'll take a constitutional round the pansy beds," I said, waving my hand. Then I went quickly downstairs and out into the garden.

"Hullo, mother, you *are* an early bird." You bent down and kissed me, and I put my arm through yours.

"I know, but I was such a late one

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

yesterday, and it's such a beautiful morning. What are you doing to-day?"

"Nothing, till you say what you'd like."

I looked out across the meadows and up into the sky. Everything seemed blue and gold.

"I'd like to go out all day in the car and just drive and drive. The cherry blossom's out, and we could lunch under the trees at the Cherry Tree Inn." (The place we were going to, beloved, the disastrous day we didn't go, nearly twenty-six years before.)

You looked up into the sky. It is a brave thing to suggest lunching out of doors in England in May, but it was a brave day. Your eyes kindled. "How jolly!" We went on walking and talking till we came to the little stream that runs through the garden. The purple irises were still growing in the rushes by the edge of it, and a white butterfly was fluttering over

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

them just as it did when I dreamed over the little white garments I stitched while I was waiting for you to come to me.

"Mother!" you spoke quickly, and I looked up and smiled into your eyes.

"Yes?"

"I wanted to speak to you yesterday, but you were different somehow." You hesitated, watching me as if even now you were not sure whether to go on. I stooped to pick a flower; then I put it into the buttonhole of your coat with very great care.

"When you are an old lady and go to dances and behave like a young one, you will be allowed to be a pig the next day," I said. "Don't ever take any notice of things like that."

An expression of intense relief crept into your face, although your words were indignant.

"You weren't a pig, and you'll never be old!" you said hotly.

I stretched up my arms and took

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your face between my hands as I used when you were little.

“My child, who is she?”

For a while you did not speak and we stood so, just looking into each other's eyes. All wonderment was in yours; and in mine my heart was lying bare.

“Mother!” you said breathlessly, “how did you know?”

Oh, wonderful, mysterious tricksters who leave the rabbit sticking out of your pockets and gasp when we discover your tricks and unmask your subtleties! Oh, babies hiding behind a handkerchief! I laughed that I should not weep.

“It's my bones again,” I said; “they tell me everything—except who she is.”

For answer you put an arm round me and slowly drew a portrait from the pocket of your coat, holding it for a fraction of a moment before you gave it to me.

“Mum, she's such a dear.” You

ON GIVING IN MARRIAGE

spoke gladly, but there was a wistfulness in your voice that brought the tears very near my eyes. But they were not for myself, beloved.

"I know she is," I said quickly, and stretched out my hand for the picture.

You gave it to me and turned away.

VII. ON WOMEN AND LOVE

VII. ON WOMEN AND LOVE



TRY as I do to be humble about you, beloved, I can't imagine you anything but a triumphant success what-

ever you do and wherever you go. On the field of battle, or in the drawing-room, it is just the same, and my imagination has not been at work for the fraction of a moment before I have filled the trenches with your dead, and the nunneries with your disconsolate. It is simply a terrifying responsibility to have called up a demigod.

I can't give you advice as to how to keep your head while a post over the Commander-in-Chief is being invented for your acceptance, because it is a situation that has never yet come within my ken, and I feel rather at a loss as to how it should be dealt with. So, for the chastening of both our proud spirits, I will put you

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

straight into the drawing-room, pretend you are just an ordinary mortal, and tell you what would happen to you if you really were.

As it is drawing-rooms we are in, the matter naturally has to do with women. To begin with, I must tell you it takes all sorts of women to make a world. There are pretty ones and silly ones, and straight ones and crooked ones: and deep ones and shallow ones, and passionate ones and cold ones. And if a man is at all presentable-looking, and has a fair amount of wit, he is likely to receive a great deal more attention than may be good for him. And unless he has some idea of how to value the favours that are bestowed upon him, he may think such favours are due solely to his peculiar charms, and be a little inclined to put on airs because of it.

Now, whatever my own private opinion may be on the score of you personally, I am bound by honesty to tell you that there are many women

ON WOMEN AND LOVE

in the world who will go bald-headed (your own vernacular, my son) for you, for no other reason than because you are a man, just as there are many men who cannot see a pair of heels disappearing round a corner without twisting their moustaches and re-cocking their hats. And, as well as those, there are women with a definite purpose before them. Mothers with daughters to settle, daughters with no mothers to arrange their affairs for them; and even if it is not so great a matter as the founding of new dynasties, there are women who are lonely, women who are disappointed in their husbands; and, last and least of all, women who want nothing more than the brush that they may hang it beside the last, and go out quickly to bring in the next.

Whatever you do, beloved, don't think I am trying to talk cynically, for indeed I am not. It is quite right and natural that mothers should want to find good husbands for their

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daughters, and it is just as right and natural that girls with or without mothers should seek mates for themselves. And as long as love matters to a woman and husbands are neglectful, so long will there be a chair set for the young man whose bearing is gallant, and whose heart is kind. But I want you to know that these things have existed in some form or other since ever the world began, and it is not because they need you alone that mothers smile and daughters blush, and unsatisfied wives gladden and coquettes entice. It will on occasions be you, but it will as often be what you stand for : to the mothers an anchorage for their daughters, to the daughters a husband for themselves, to the unsatisfied wives a consolation, and to the coquettes another scalp for their chatelaines. When the honours are so divided it ought to be easy for men to remain humble, and in telling you this I am not trying to belittle life, or to discount you. I

ON WOMEN AND LOVE

only want your sense of proportion to be true, that you may have the *real* value of yourself and your own kind.

Perhaps if I wanted to make life easy for you instead of great, I would do better to warn you against the big things of it, for every great thing has its great penalties, and if you are going to scale the mountain-tops you must take the risks that go with the climbing. And in the matter of love, if I wanted to save you trouble, I would tell you not to take women too seriously, so that if one played you false the wound would not be deep enough to leave a scar. But I want you to be great, I want you to be splendid, and I want you to make great and splendid men to follow after you. And unless you think greatly you cannot live greatly, and unless you live greatly you were better not to live at all.

I have written to you of your loving, and because I wanted it to be so it

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was a happy one that I dreamed for you. In my imaginings I gave you all the joy that has been Oliver's and mine. I put, without any foretaste of pain or disappointment, a woman into your arms who would love you as I have loved your father; for I have loved him faithfully, my son, even though I have not always been as wise and as patient as he has; indeed, I have loved him faithfully. That such happiness may be yours I will ask always. But if it were not to be. If love came to you with averted face; if it brought desire without fulfilment and longing without completion. If it offered you everything and gave you nothing, if it gave you everything only to take it away again, *still* I would tell you that it is the greatest thing in all the world, and that you are richer in suffering through it than in passing your life in ease and comfort without it. If you can feel that, if you can count it well lost in the trying for and bless the pain

ON WOMEN AND LOVE

that brought the knowledge of it, then you have opened the gates of Paradise for yourself, and they can never quite close upon you again, for you have seen God.

But to know love like that, one must not fritter. It may be amusing to play about with some one who means no more to you than you do in the playing, but it takes the edge off the real thing. It is one thing to give of yourself gladly to pretty and sweet, and charming women, and it is another to kiss them all because you think they look for it. I would hate you to be a prig, and if I thought that anything I wrote was going to make you stop and take your temperature every time you saw a woman in the offing, I would tear up this letter and leave you to your fate. But I want you to be a true knight, beloved, I want the whole world to be glad because of you, and you will help the world of women much better by thinking for them chivalrously

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than of them inordinately. You can right more wrongs by seeing that you yourself do none than you can by kissing away the ones that others are responsible for, and if you remember in time that one of the best ways of helping people out of difficulties is not to put them in, you will see to it that no whim or self-indulgence of your own shall be paid for by any one but yourself. Women can suffer as desperately through men's carelessness as through their deliberate intent. The match thrown down among the shavings makes as good a fire as any started in the grate, and it is small comfort after the house is destroyed to hear the one who did it say that he is sorry.

For that reason and for many others, do not play at love. Give it the honour that is due to it, and even though you may not get fulfilment of it where you seek it, you will get strength and power through it till the very end of time. Make for it a

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garden in your mind where it may walk cleanly and unafraid, and when everything else fails the spirit of it will carry you out on to the mountain-tops to gather your strength and your courage afresh from the hands of God; and the knowledge of it will keep in you always the heart of a little child. “*He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee, and with their hands they shall bear thee up lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*” Those angels are the truth, and the love, and the honour, and the courage that are within you, and so long as you wish to keep them there so long will they give help whenever you need it. Beloved, I think I am not afraid for you.

VIII. ON WALKING
IN THE MEADOWS

VIII. ON WALKING IN THE MEADOWS



WONDER if you will love this place as Oliver and I do, or if by the time it comes to you you will have outgrown it, and want something quite different in another part of the world altogether? Perhaps because I do not want to, I can't imagine it so. I can't think of you caring any less than we do, I can't dream of you not having every stick and stone, every turn and corner, so closely woven into your being that to part with a scrap of it would be like parting with your flesh and blood. Yet one knows that sons have not always that feeling for their homes. Still, with you I feel it would be so, I feel it would be so.

This afternoon, when tea was over, Oliver said to me, "Come for a walk, Margie," and we went through the

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white pillared porch, across the smooth green lawns and out into the sunshine together. Trixy was lying in the hall, and as we passed she got up and followed silently, her little adoring body trotting close upon the heels of her master, her head bent mutely. And every now and then as we stopped to look at a flower or a shrub in the Long Walk that led away to the meadows, she would look up into Oliver's face and scan it, eager for the least sign of recognition in his eyes. Once he stopped and patted her head, and her face was lovely to see. She didn't make any fuss, but no matter how reserved she might be at her head end, her tail couldn't keep her secret for half an instant.

"It makes my throat ache to see the way Trixy loves you," I said to Oliver.

He looked at her and her tail began again.

"You might be the greatest thief

WALKING IN THE MEADOWS

and pickpocket in existence and she'd love you just the same, when once she'd started."

Oliver looked at me without speaking, but as if he were searching for something.

"I think that's the way I love you, Margie," he said at last.

All that for me in the sunshine among the flowers with a lovely thing going to happen to me soon! And for so many women nothing, not even the right to give what they longed to bestow! I seized his hands in a passion.

"I'm a beast," I said, "a beast, and it isn't fair!"

He smiled slowly: "All right," he said. "As long as you're my beast, I don't care."

We went down between the hollyhocks and opened the gate into the meadows.

Beloved, do you know that first meadow intersected with little streams and waist high with feathery cow

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parsley? Do you know the little track by the edge of the stream where Oliver and I walked that day and so many other days in our happy life together? In a quiet pool shaded by overhanging trees, lives the wary old jack that your father had had his eye on for so long and his hook in never. He's got to be caught some day because he is a nuisance to the waterways, but still he is putting up a good fight and one can't help respecting him for it. Further along is a grating to keep the fish back, and over the bridge of it escapes Snarkey, the wicked poacher terrier, into the woods beyond. They don't belong to us and he gets a thrashing every time he comes back, but it makes no difference. Some day he'll fall into a trap and get his foot taken off, then perhaps he'll wish, when it's too late, that he had been a more gentlemanly mannered dog. But I don't think a born poacher ever regrets anything but the opportunities he has missed

WALKING IN THE MEADOWS

of poaching. Snarkey'll just have to dree his weird.

By the third stream, which is called a river, there are two cottages. In one lives a shoemaker, and in the other the loveliest, sprawlingest puppy you ever saw. The boy to whom it belongs told me he gave a man one-and-three for it, and when I asked him why it was so cheap, he said the man was drunk. That's not a nice thing to be, beloved, but I had to mention it because it played a noteworthy part in the puppy's history. There are red dahlias and enormous sunflowers in both the gardens, and irises are thick upon the river brim.

I never knew a more enchanting place for a boy to play in than those meadows are. But you'll have to be very careful when you are out alone in them, or else I shall die of fright every minute you are away from me, because you could be drowned fifty times a day! I said that to Oliver yesterday, and he said,

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“ Oh, he'll be all right if he's got any sense, and we'll teach him to swim as soon as his teeth are in,” which sounded very comforting, particularly as I remembered that Oliver himself, and many other Olivers beside, had grown up in the same danger without there being one lost one in the records.

We crossed the stream by the two planks near where the water-lily lives. It is the bathing-place, and the water-lily lives just round the bend of the stream where you will bathe, and you must be awfully nice to her, because, although she looks as if she were just floating on the top of the water, she is deeply attached to her home, and it would pain her very much to be wrenched away from it. Oliver and I have known her for years, and it is always a matter of great interest to us as to who should find her first. This year I did, and I told him about it at dinner.

“ The water-lily's back again,” I said.

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"Is she?" said Oliver. "I must go and call." He is a *very* courteous man, your father.

We stood for a while on the steps of the bathing-place looking down the river, and watching the moorhens darting across from bank to bank: they're always very busy about bedtime. A rat making an arrow-shaped ripple on the water was heading towards the place where we stood. It disappeared among the rushes, and Trixy barked and looked at Oliver for commendation. "Good dog!" said Oliver, and she barked again to show that she had plenty more where that one came from, and they were all Oliver's if he cared to have them.

There was a little red punt moored to the steps. It belonged to the man who had the next fishing, and it should not have been there. Oliver went on to the steps and untied the rope.

"I suppose Garth has borrowed this and forgotten to return it," he said. "I'll take it up now. He got

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in and held out his hand. "Will you come?"

I shook my head. "No," I said. "I will walk and meet you up there."

Gently the boat drifted out into mid-stream. I watched it turn and disappear behind a little island of nettles: then it appeared again, and I saw Oliver standing erect and bareheaded in the sun, punting swiftly, and Trixy sitting like a little white queen at the stern end of the boat. And it made me smile to think of the big man and the little dog, and the perfect understanding that existed between them.

I got to the landing-place before Oliver did, and I waited till he came up. The man was fishing a distant stream, and he waved a welcome to us, but we left him in peace and crossed the bridge over the weir to the shady lane that led on to the canal. Two barges of timber were in the lock. We leaned over the white-washed brick bridge and watched them. The peace and hush of evening

WALKING IN THE MEADOWS

was settling down over everything. The barge slid through the lock. A dark, sleek-haired woman with big gold rings in her ears was sitting in the cabin with a baby in her arms, and one of the bargees leaned against the open door, lazily working some tobacco in the palms of his hands. A thin curl of blue smoke that told of supper-time was coming out of the little chimney, and the barge dog was, as usual, behaving as if he were the one creature on whom the whole responsibility of everything depended. We let the horse get some distance ahead, and then we came off the bridge and started to walk home by the tow-path. Two little mites belonging to the lock cottage came out and stared, with their fingers in their mouths. I spoke to them, and they ran inside for their lives.

“Why do you sigh?” Oliver put his arm through mine and looked down at me as we walked. “Aren’t you happy?”

MORE LETTERS TO MY SON

"Almost," I said, sighing again. Indeed I was as happy as I could be, but it interested me to be asked.

"What is it you want to make you quite?" he asked.

I stopped and stood before him, looking at him earnestly.

"Oliver," I said, "will you buy me a barge-bucket?"

He laughed again and again, but I was quite serious.

"Yes, if you like. But why on earth do you want a barge-bucket?"

"Because they're so gay. I've never met any bucket that was gay like a barge-bucket. Buckets are such dull things as a rule. I never thought till I saw that one to-day that I could care so much for one, and now I know that I've wanted one all my life."

"All right," he said; "we'll wire for one to-morrow."

"And say that it's got to be covered all over with pink and red roses and

WALKING IN THE MEADOWS

green leaves just like the one we've seen?"

"Yes."

"And a jug as well?"

"A jug as well, if you like."

I slipped my hand into his and gave another sigh.

"You're a very understanding husband," I said contentedly.

We walked back slowly along the canal for a little distance and then turned into the meadows and followed the stream home. We didn't talk at all, but once Oliver looked down at me and smiled; and he said, "Dear little Margie," and I looked back at him and smiled too, and said, "Dear big Oliver;" and everything we wanted to say was in that.

The sun had gone down behind the pine woods, and the cottage windows were beginning to be lighted when we got back. As we came up the Long Walk and crossed the lawns I could see, through the open window of the dining-room, Ellen, putting the

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finishing touches to the dinner-table. It was all so intimate, so homelike, and so *kind* that I felt as if I were resting in some great heart.

If only every woman might be as happy as I.

IX. ON THE WORLD'S
PIPERS

IX. ON THE WORLD'S PIPERS



ALL day the wind has been blowing. When I was little I used to hate it. I used to lie awake shivering at night in my bed, and listen to it howling round the house, feeling it was some ferocious thing that was trying to get at me. And I was always afraid, too, of the house coming down. But now I am not afraid any more, and I love it. I love the feeling of stir and life that it gives, the power and the strength of it, the unending vitality it seems to speak.

To-day it was just as if a lusty giant were striding through the world with a message to tell. And the message was so wonderful that it set the whole earth a-moving. It was that a new life was coming soon. And when the trees heard the secret they threw up their arms and sang : and

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the grass trembled with excitement, and the little streams raced for joy And I felt so great that I bent towards them, and said in a whisper that only my heart heard: "*I* am giving him to you, and he will be ours together." And it seemed to me as if for just one moment everything stopped to listen, and when it had heard the earth began to sing again.

Beloved, before I knew that I was going to have you, I used to long, and long, and long. Hannah did not vow her little Samuel more greatly than I vowed you, if only you might be given to me. You were to belong to the world, and all people were to be that much happier and gladder because of you. You were to be a song to hearten, a hand to aid, a strong, brave wind to freshen.

And now that you are really coming, I give you all over again. Every now and then it seems as if the world were growing old, and tired, and jaded; as if it had worked too hard,

ON THE WORLD'S PIPERS

and thought too deeply, to be able to enjoy the pleasure that belonged to it : as if it could not run or laugh any more, and only wanted to go to bed and sleep. But, just as it is going to put its weary old head upon the pillow, somebody comes along and pipes a tune that sets it dancing again. And the people steal out of their houses to listen, for it reminds them of the music they heard when they were little. And when they are out they begin to wonder why they spent so much time indoors, with the grass so green, and the flowers smelling so sweet. And the grumpy ones put their heads through the windows, and say, "What the deuce is all this racket for?" But they don't always shut their windows in a very great hurry ; and sometimes they have even been known to come outside unwillingly. And when they have gone back there have been some young marks on their faces where a smile had walked. And when the

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Curtain Draw-er has come to draw the curtains they have said, quite crossly for their honour's sake, "You needn't shut the windows yet." And although the Curtain Draw-er was discreet and well-trained enough to say nothing out loud, It noticed the young marks, and thought to Itself: "There must be something wrong with master ; he's almost good-looking."

Such a piper came a little while ago, and he said, "The world belongs to the children, I'm going to give it back to them." He piped the poor ones from their small homes, and the rich ones from their big ones. He taught them to make a wonderful game out of Things That Matter, and he played it with them himself, so they should like it that much more, and play it that much better. It didn't matter whether a child were rich or poor, he could play it just as well if he only put his heart into it. And it was such an entrancing game, that when once he got to know it, he

ON THE WORLD'S PIPERS

couldn't keep his heart *out* of it, which showed what a terrible lot the piper must have known to be able to make it up. And all the time the children played, their little bodies were growing straighter, and their minds cleaner, and their hearts more full of courage, just because the song they were singing was a lovely one, and had to be sung not only with their lips, but with their hearts and their bodies; and they sang it in the open air, and all together. And the piper watched and listened. And as he watched and listened, for the life of him he couldn't be sorry for what he had done.

Child, whatever life gives or denies you, you must give it a song. Not the song of your own prowess, nor of your own woes, but the song of fellowship and kinship with the world; such a song as when they hear it will remind men of the joys and sorrows and loves and hopes and passions of their own lives; such a song as when they are desolate will put a hand upon

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their shoulder, and when they have given up will make them go on again. Promise me now, this minute, that you will be a piper. And if you promise that, beloved, I will promise you something in return. For the reward to the piper who sings his song bravely is, that never as long as the breath is in his body will the gods allow him to grow old. He is one whom they love, and whom they love we know are young to the end of their lives. You shall *never* grow old if you will be a piper.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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"Not many, we think, will read, 'Letters to My Son' with dry eyes."—*Morning Leader*.

"The author of these letters has managed to write down without searching for effect the emotions which many women must feel at the most ecstatic and triumphant period of their lives. These letters are full of an overwhelming love for the child that is to be, and at the same time there is a self-revelation of the woman herself, most touching in its sincerity and pathos. Few women could read this book without feeling tears of sympathy in their eyes, yet the appeal to the emotional side of the reader is not exaggerated."—*Literary Post*.

